

Plan for school at ranch creative ploy for economy

Good for the Oberlin City Council and the Oberlin School Board, agreeing to pay a consultant to evaluate the idea of a boarding school at the old Sappa Valley Youth Ranch.

Having 30 or 40 or 50 students living at the ranch would beat most any benefit the city could derive from selling the facility on the Internet. Having 30 or 40 or 50 students go to high school in town would save a bunch of teaching jobs.

This is pretty good thinking on the part of Pat Cullen, the new superintendent of schools, and Peggy Pratt, regional supervisor for Juvenile Justice.

The City Council just seemed tired of the ranch after the state shut it down last fall. Constant escapes, near riots, misbehavior and destruction of property plagued the operation.

None of that is unusual in a juvenile detention facility. Boys were sent to the ranch because they had problems. A day or two there didn't cure them.

But after a while, it got old. People complained to the state, and the state shut down the ranch.

That hurt Oberlin, because at least 37 jobs at the ranch and six (four full time) at the schools depended on the operation. No one asked the people of either the city or the school district what we thought of that.

Maybe the ranch was not well run. Maybe it was more trouble than it was worth. But to those who worked there, or taught there, the

jobs were pretty important.

If the new plan flies — and it will take a lot of work by the school district, by civic leaders, by the city and by the rest of us — maybe the jobs can be recreated without the problems attendant to housing and trying to educate a bunch of delinquents.

A lot of questions have to be answered first, but having a solid, publicly backed operation at the ranch would beat selling a valuable civic asset.

Selling a facility — an old school or church or a former youth ranch — on the Internet is a gamble at best. Some towns, like Jennings with Bus and Coach International, hit the jackpot. Others have nothing to show for their efforts but an empty building and a failed dream. They are no better off than they were before they sold the building.

Most probably come out somewhere in between. Some have gone through several owners without creating much in the way of income or jobs for their communities.

This boarding school proposal is creative thinking at its best.

Will the market support a boarding school? Can it bring in enough to pay its way, including state support? Will the students it draws be well-behaved citizens or troublemakers?

Those and a lot of other questions beg an answer. But it's an idea that has a ring of possibility about it. We should all be behind it.

— Steve Haynes

Bring back DDT? Not likely

A friend gave me a copy of a column in the Wall Street Journal advocating the rehabilitation of the long-banned insecticide DDT to combat West Nile virus.

The article, by Dr. Henry I. Miller, a fellow at the conservative Hoover Institution and former federal health official, sounds a drumbeat for DDT. The drum is hollow, though.

Lots of noise, little substance.

Dr. Miller makes much of the threat of West Nile — 4,300 "serious" cases and "almost" 200 deaths last year. That might rank the virus right up there with ingrown toenail as a cause of death in America.

He does give some interesting information on the apparent mutation of a relatively mild virus once found only in Africa to a potential killer, but the truth is that West Nile has never lived up to its billing.

Nevertheless, the article advocates a massive program of spraying for mosquito control without any indication that success is possible.

Could we spray every swamp and old tire in backwoods America? Would that prevent any significant number of West Nile cases? And at what cost, in money and wildlife?

Dr. Miller seems to think it would be justified if spraying saved even one human life. He completely ignores the fact that the ban on DDT is working as intended to restore wildlife, especially birds of prey.

Many raptors, especially the iconic bald eagle, became endangered when DDT spraying was common. The persistent chemical was thought to weaken the shell of their eggs, among other things.

Today, the eagle is no longer threatened, but it's only a symbol of



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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the harm once caused by unrestrained spraying. Today, you can see eagles along many Kansas rivers and at reservoirs where once they were unknown.

Balancing questions of cost and benefit is never easy, but the numbers given for West Nile — versus the cost in dollars and possible environmental damages for massive spraying — do not add up.

Granted, Dr. Miller does not advocate a return to widespread industrial use of DDT by farmers. Even he sees the danger there.

But he gives no evidence on the practicality or the effectiveness of spraying for mosquito control. To prevent an unknown portion of 200 deaths a year, though, the cost could be hard to justify.

A vaccine against West Nile might be more cost effective, but given the small number of deaths, that research seems to have taken a back seat to bigger killers. And that is as it should be.

He makes a more interesting case for using DDT to control mosquitoes in places where tropical diseases such as malaria and dengue fever thrive. He claims, without giving any figures, that these diseases are on the rise since the demise of DDT. Still, he's talking about 1 mil-

lion deaths a year out of a world population 6.7 billion. That's a minuscule percentage, like one death in a town of 6,700 people in a year.

How much DDT can you spray? And how many mosquitoes are there in Africa? Could we kill them all? Or even have an impact. I don't know, and Dr. Miller doesn't say.

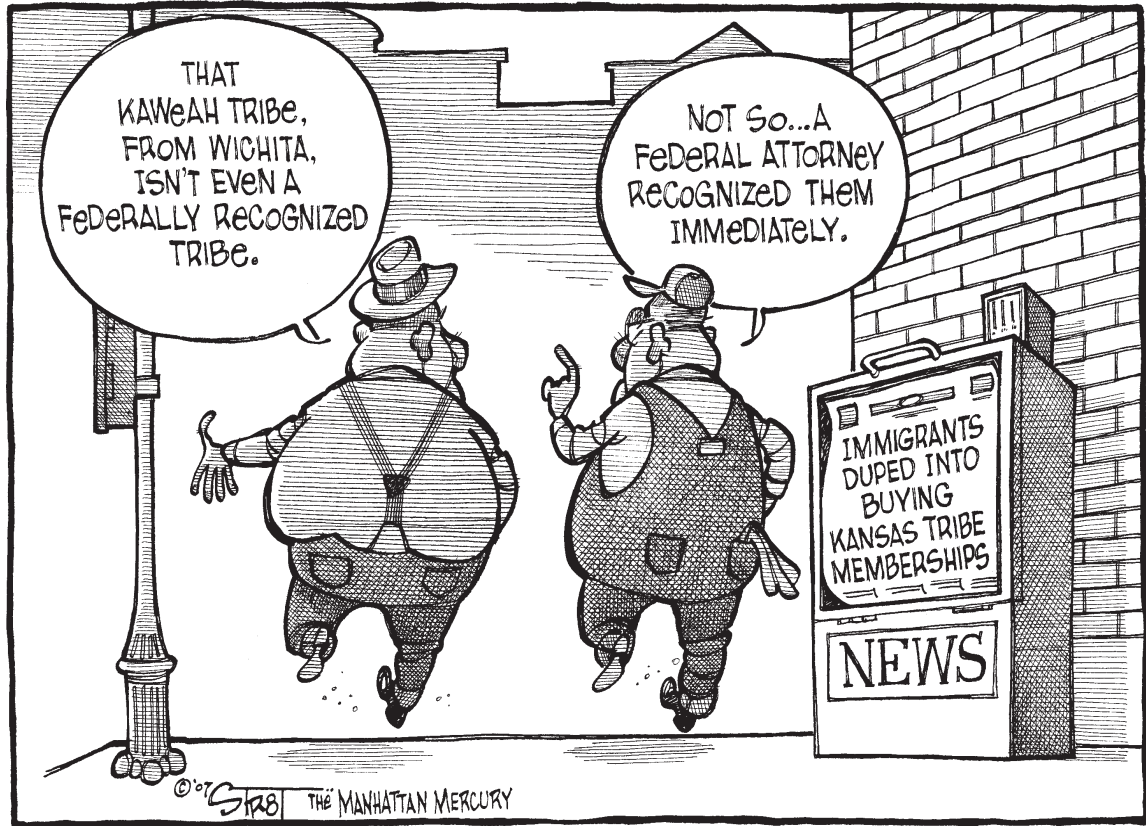
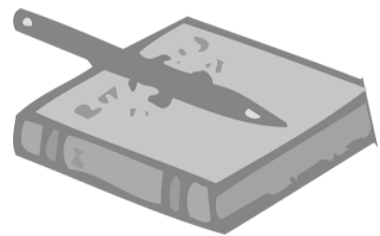
To save half a million lives, I'd be willing to try. But I suspect as killers go, even malaria pales in Africa.

I don't think DDT is coming back anytime soon.

From the Bible

Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.

Psalm 119:76



Bird feeder might please cats

I've always had bird feeders up when I'm in Colorado, but only for hummingbirds.

Years ago, we had a cat who loved hummingbirds — for lunch.

When I realized that he was catching the birds, I took down my feeders, which were suspended from the overhang on the front porch.

However, I discovered that it didn't make any different. Midnight would lie under a small aspen tree and wait for the birds to light in a lower branch. Then, like a flash, he'd nail them. The birds came whether I had feeders out or not.

I put the feeders back up.

Those trees are big now and the cat is long gone, but the hummingbird feeders still keep the little suckers flying around the front porch.

This year I decided to go with something new. I got a two-sided iron stand and had Steve put it out by a 12-foot spruce tree in the yard. Then I bought two cheap bird feeders — really just cheap plastic cylinders with eight holes and plastic perches on the sides. I got a 4.5-pound bag of mixed wild-bird seed and filled my feeders. It was enough to fill both twice.

And I needed to fill both twice. In fact, in five days I bought and mostly emptied two bags of food.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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Yeah, my feeders were a big hit. I counted up to a dozen birds jockeying for position around the perches at one time.

Most of the little cheepers were sparrows, but we had several larger brown birds and a couple of jays.

The jays were particularly interesting because they were blue, but they were not blue jays. A check on the Internet gave us their name — Steller's jay — largish blue birds with a black head and the dominant jay crest. There is little difference in the coloring between males and females, and both have white eyebrows.

While all that information was fine, it was more fun watching them try to eat out of a feeder set up for wrens, sparrows and finches. The jays would sit on a perch and eat out of a hole on the other side, ducking to get the grain and then tossing their

heads back to swallow. All of this was accomplished with a lot of wing waving as they tried to keep their balance on the tiny perches.

It was all very entertaining but they lost a lot of grain that way. I figured that some bird would get it off the ground or the resident squirrels would get in on the act.

I would really like to set up a similar operation in my back yard at home. However, there is a difference. In Colorado, the cats aren't allowed outside. Here, they spend most of their time on the back porch right next to the tree and I've found enough bird bodies around here without giving them any help.

I guess I'll just have to content myself with saving about nine pounds of bird food a week and spending the money on cat food instead.

Does cat have a pierced ear?

There's a jewel thief loose in my house. He has blue-green eyes, whiskers, two perky ears, four little paws and is known as Sammy the Siamese.

Well, jewel thief may be a little strong. That would imply I actually have jewels. Perhaps I should have said he is a borrower of cheap costume jewelry.

I have a bad habit of taking my pierced earrings off at night and laying them on counter by my bathroom sink. Several times now, I have awakened to find only one earring by the sink.

And I've found Sammy prowling the countertops, looking for more "booty." That cat is more like a retriever dog than a feline.

If he finds a piece of plastic or a paper bag, he bats it around like he's playing with a mouse. I know he's



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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just acting naturally, but now I have a box of single earrings without a mate.

Anybody know a lady with one ear, or a pirate with bad taste?

-ob-
We're starting to see the first signs of fall. Sunflowers are beginning to curl up and die. Ensilage is being cut, corn is drying up in the fields. Temperatures have dropped a few degrees. It's the season, the cycle of life.

-ob-
It's going to be a long year. The presidential election is more than a year off and we've been hearing the campaign rhetoric for months.

Truthfully, most Americans have already made up their minds. Even if they're not 100 percent sure who they will vote for, most of them definitely know who they won't vote for.

Reader questions wind-farm plan

To the Editor:

The Oberlin City council is prudent in questioning the proposed wind-farm contract being foisted upon them by Sunflower Wind. It has been only six years since the last snake oil salesman, from Tekquity Ventures, visited Decatur County and the salesman succeeded in taking \$25,000 for a strategic plan that any high school student could have prepared.

It is worth reading again about that fiasco as presented on the front page of *The Oberlin Herald* on Wednesday, March 14, 2001. It is available on the Internet at the nwkansas.com web site.

One has to seriously question all the secrecy and scarcity of information provided by Sunflower Wind to date. Sunflower has not been forthcoming with the community and the "three-week edict" shows, in my opinion, their arrogance and lack of planning on their part.

It will probably interest folks in the area that Rawlins County is exploring the possibility of a 300-megawatt wind farm near Atwood. The proposal by Sunflower Wind does not even show up on the Kansas Wind Energy list of proposed and active wind-farm sites. To me, this indicates the Sunflower proposal is a spur-of-the moment idea and lacks adequate planning.

Sunflower Wind has a novel approach with using hydrogen generation during calm periods, which

Letter to the Editor

sounds similar to the farmer in Gove County who hoodwinked everyone with his "hydrogen generator." He supposedly electrolyzed water in the bottom of his well by using a combine reel twirling in the wind, and of course he used the hydrogen to power his pickup. It was all a hoax, but it garnered national attention.

Wind power is a viable energy provider when everyone understands its cost and limitations. The council obviously understands that signing a contract with Sunflower Wind might actually escalate the cost of electricity if for some reason Sunflower Wind cannot deliver power as promised. And like most machinery, the wind machines have a finite life span and considerable costs are associated with decommissioning a wind farm.

For my two cents, I would run away as fast as I could from a firm wanting to erect a 50- to 70-megawatt wind farm with generators that had seen limited use and had been tested for only a year. That is a disaster waiting to happen.

Quote from an April 2007 issue of *This Week in Congress* by Rep. Jerry Moran: "Daniel Rasure of Goodland was in with Sunflower Renewables to discuss potential wind en-

ergy projects in Kansas." Maybe Mr. Moran could shed some more light on the project.

I think Mr. Rasure has his track shoes on and is hoping folks will leap before they look. The council would be wise to tell him to put away his smoke and mirrors and to come back if and when he has a legitimate and workable plan.

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Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.
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